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ABSTRACT

Based on visits to 11 schools in 6 urban areas across the country, this article describes the perspectives and behavioral responses of school staff to "reaching out" policies that lead schools to form partnerships with parents and community organizations for the purpose of enhancing children's development and academic achievement. All of the schools were members of the Institute for Responsive Education's League of Schools Reaching Out and served many children from poverty areas. A brief introduction is followed by sections concerning: (1) policy implementation in three districts; (2) policies and organizational structures; (3) the principal as intermediary; (4) school culture and shared decision-making; (5) interactions among teachers and parents; and (6) policy implications related to structures and interpersonal relations. Findings indicated that sustained attention over a relatively long period of time is required for the formation of working partnerships among schools and parents. Reaching out programs are dependent on process, and the school principal is the key actor in the implementation of policies. Implementation ultimately depends on the degree to which teachers can reach out to parents in ways that facilitate participation. Citations number 23. (RH)

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Organizational Structures and Interpersonal Relations:

Policy Implications for Schools Reaching Out

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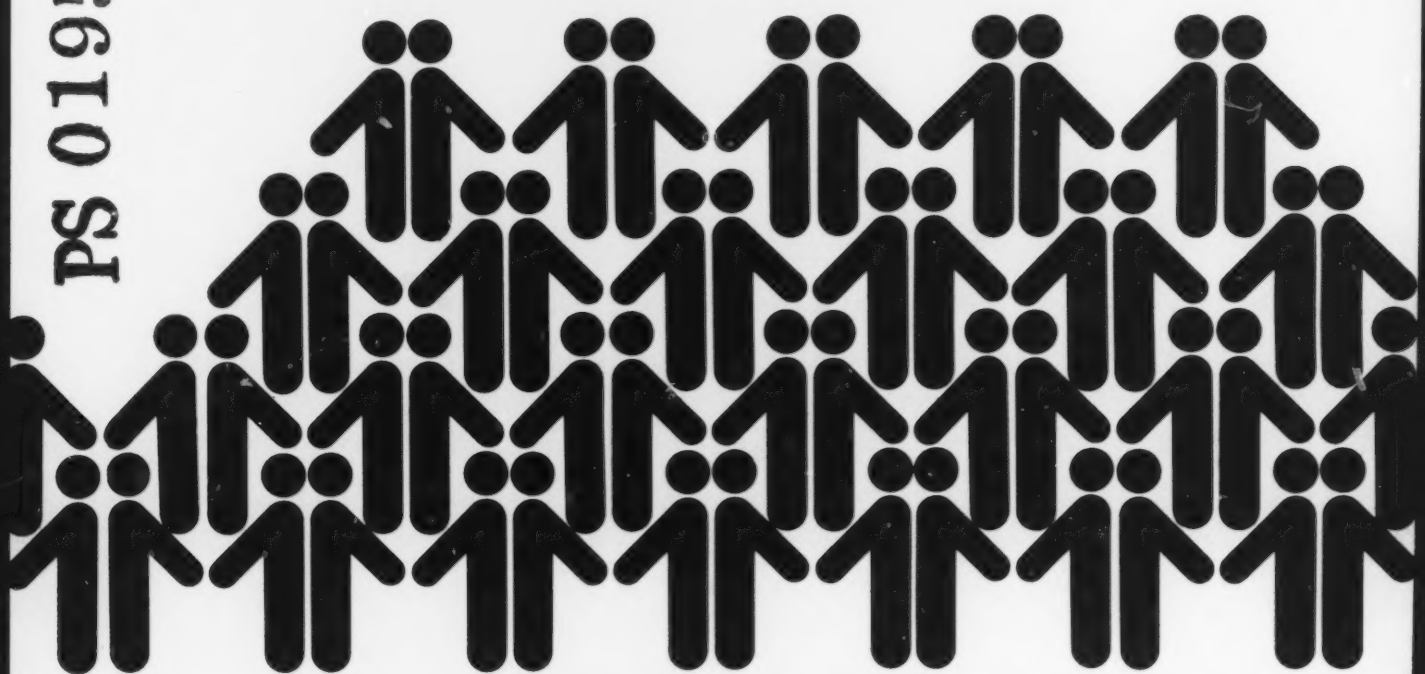

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Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Telephone: (617) 353-3309

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS REACHING OUT

Shepherd Zeldin
August 1990

Schools Reaching Out is a project which attempts to demonstrate that urban public schools can fundamentally change their relationship with low-income parents and their communities, and in so doing, move closer to the goal of academic and social success for all children.

The project began in September 1988 as two schools -- the David A. Ellis School in Boston and P.S. 111, the Ochs School in New York City -- agreed to collaborate with the Institute for Responsive Education as "laboratory schools" trying out strategies to build new relationships with parents and the community.

Schools Reaching Out was designed to interweave research and practice. While the laboratory schools work, aided by IRE staff, to refine new strategies, a team of researchers is investigating questions of what works and why -- again, in collaboration with the schools' staff. This publication, and the series of which it is a part, is an effort to relate some of those learnings.

For more information on Schools Reaching Out or the series of publications, write to: Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

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INTRODUCTION

Many educators advocate policies that require schools to "reach out" and form partnerships with parents and community organizations for the purpose of enhancing child development and academic achievement. Unfortunately, most state education and federal grant offices have not provided leadership or ongoing assistance to advance home and school connections and, structurally, the programs are operated as activities supplemental to the school curriculum (Nardine, Chapman, and Moles, 1988; Turnbull, Zeldin, and Cain, 1990; Epstein, 1987). The results are that reaching out policies are typically not implemented as envisioned, participation by poor parents remains low, and programs are often not continued when start-up money is no longer available.

McLaughlin and Shields (1987) remind us that top-down directives and organizational structures are necessary to initiate partnerships programs, but are not sufficient to promote the collaborative orientation among stakeholders needed to sustain these initiatives. For example, Davies (1990) notes that "the concept of shared responsibility and collaborative effort seems radical and almost out-of-reach to many school staff." Specifically, many administrators and teachers question the interest or ability of poor parents to participate. The subtle manifestations of this belief, reinforced by institutional and cultural norms, combine to send an implicit message that parents are not welcome in the school. Many poor parents and those from

"caste minorities," regardless of economic class, respond by developing a distrust of schools or by adopting the view that they don't have the competence to support their children's schooling (Davies, 1989; Ogbu, 1988; Slaughter and Epps, 1987).

The complementary mindsets of schools' staff and low-income, ethnic parents reflect patterns of modern racism and internalized oppression (Batts, 1989), and can preclude partnerships among diverse individuals. Comer (1988), describing the dismal outcomes of the first year of implementation in the New Haven project, is led to conclude:

> We learned, first of all, that both the schools and our project needed more structure.... More important, our analysis of interactions among parents, staff, and students revealed a basic problem... the sociocultural misalignment between home and school... It was obvious that we would make no progress until we had reduced the destructive interactions among parents, teachers, and administrators.

Research on partnership-oriented policies typically does not specify the types of programs under study (Lareau, 1989), yet different policies will have disparate influences on stakeholder attitudes. Thus, the Committee on Policy for Racial Justice (1989) recommends policies that emphasize the centrality of interpersonal relations among administrators, teachers, and parents. This reflects Bronfenbrenner's (1978) ecological position that policy must be child-centered, but more importantly, should aim to support linkages among all adult caretakers. Other research indicates that policies which provide opportunities for shared decision-making can promote collaborative orientations among stakeholders (Krasnow, 1990).

This article describes the perspectives and behavioral responses of school staff to reaching out policies, and is based on visits to eleven schools in six urban areas. All schools are members of IRE's "League of Schools Reaching Out," and serve high percentages of children from poverty areas. Four schools -- one each in Cleveland, Prince Georges County, Indianapolis, and Richmond -- were selected for close attention in this inquiry. At each site, I interviewed district staff, the school principal, and at least four teachers (identified as being most involved with parents), in addition to holding shorter conversations with other staff and with parents. In Cleveland and Prince Georges County, I also interviewed the principal and two key staff at a second school. Finally, I conducted interviews with district staff and principals at three "League" schools in San Diego and one school in Plano, Texas. These schools were beginning implementation of new initiatives. In sum, this purposeful sample includes schools and staff most likely to endorse reaching out policies.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN THREE DISTRICTS

Two middle schools in Cleveland, an elementary school in Indianapolis, and two elementary schools in Prince Georges County (MD) are highlighted in this section. Each school has been successful in raising student achievement and attributes this success in part to increased parent involvement. The following profiles focus on selected policies to illustrate different patterns of staff response.

Business, Community and School Linkages in Cleveland

The Cleveland school district is promoting school-community partnerships. In response to appeals by the Cleveland Roundtable (a committee of business, community, and education leaders), businesses are "adopting" schools. They provide funds for materials, training, and events, and employees often serve as tutors. The type of support varies by sponsor. In one school, corporate support has provided all students access to computer-assisted instruction and advanced software. The principal had not requested that his sponsor support parent involvement activities, in part because of an implicit understanding that "parents are the district's responsibility."

Partnerships with community organizations are also encouraged. A second school visited does not have a wealthy business sponsor, but local agencies (e.g., senior citizen center, homeless shelter) have created opportunities for internships and field trips for students. The school uses funds from the state's Project Perform (aimed at increasing reading performance) to help support these activities. The principal encourages teachers to incorporate the field experiences into classroom instruction and to include parents in the field trips. Some teachers do, and others tend not to seek the involvement of parents. This is of some concern to the principal, but she also believes that teachers need autonomy to determine the most effective ways of involving parents. The forum for parent expression in Cleveland is through court-ordered district, area, and building-level school-community

councils. On the building level, parents hold the leadership positions. Their role is to advise the principal on school issues, and to vote on hiring decisions. Parent involvement has been very low, however, and principals noted that the council's influence has been minimal. By policy, teachers are not part of the council, and they rarely attend meetings. Not unexpectedly, they expressed little interest or knowledge of council activities. As one teacher concluded, "the council is the parents' thing, not ours." A similar outcome was witnessed in response to the district's implementation of parent education. This policy is enacted through area councils, and teachers knew little about the objectives or operation of the education program.

The district is attempting to address the isolation among teachers and parents. A recent contract pays teachers for up to 14 hours of phone or personal meetings with parents. The union representative commented that teachers are ambivalent -- more parents are attending, but there is not enough paid time to have full discussions. As a result, discussions tend to be cursory and "problem-oriented."

A state-funded IMPACT program stands in stark contrast. This program serves one-third of the "poorest achievers" in each school, and rather than isolate parents, teachers, and students during the educational process, the policy requires collaboration. Its goal is to increase reading achievement, and a quarter of instructional time is allocated to parent involvement. In one school, the teacher makes frequent home visits, and 70 percent of the parents attend

conferences. A collaborative orientation was witnessed through her words and programming choices, and indeed, she was viewed by two colleagues as the "expert in dealing with parents." Yet, other staff knew very little about the IMPACT program, in part because of scheduling decisions. In both schools, grade level teachers share a daily planning period, but supplemental academic staff (such as IMPACT) meet at a different time. More important is that joint planning is not a priority. According to one principal, the union resists efforts to dictate the use of planning periods, so while there is a district policy on "teaming," it occurs on an infrequent basis.

In brief, the schools in Cleveland were implementing more reaching out programs (only the most extensive are described here) than others in this inquiry. More parents are working with the school. Yet teachers, except for those in the IMPACT program, remain highly frustrated with the outcomes of their efforts, and a collaborative mindset was not expressed during discussions. This seemed to stem from the structural autonomy of the programs. For example, one school does have a "parent liaison," who has four periods a week to encourage and coordinate parent involvement, but because of the diffuse efforts throughout the school, she too has chosen to facilitate her own independent efforts. Additionally, most policies do not require parent-teacher interaction during implementation. It is therefore not surprising that Cleveland's staff were most likely to express a clear dichotomy between the roles of teachers and those of parents.

Keeping Parents Informed in Indianapolis

The principal at the school I visited has clearly become the emotional and instructional leader for students, parents, and staff. He strongly models a caring attitude; during my visit, many children solicited and received a hug from the principal. The principal is a strong disciplinarian. When students are behaving poorly, the principal is typically responsible for contacting parents, and when needed, drives the children home. All teachers emphasized that parents often call the principal for assistance, primarily on non-school related issues, such as advice for dealing with city agencies. Teachers also stressed that the principal serves as their instructional role model, and they also respect his efforts to improve their working conditions. For illustration, the principal supervises the three lunch periods "so that my teachers can have an hour break, and so that I can model appropriate behavior to the children."

Indiana authorizes two half-days of instructional time annually for teacher-parent conferences. Staff use training materials, developed by the district, to enhance the quality of the conferences. A majority of parents attend. This success, according to teachers, is because they maintain ongoing contact with parents through open houses and the like. Most teachers also send daily or weekly progress reports to parents. Teachers noted that the report takes only a "couple of minutes to complete, and parents have come to expect this communication." District staff have also provided extensive in-service to encourage home-school

learning approaches, and to implement school-family instructional contracts. Many district schools use these strategies, but staff at this school have not found them applicable to their needs. Using grant monies, the school has recently set up two neighborhood homework centers which provide after-school tutorial assistance and a place to study.

A district "effective schools" policy requires a committee to develop and implement a building improvement plan. Home-school relations is one focus of the "school climate" committee, according to the faculty coordinator. Parent representation is not required. The committee has completed a comprehensive self-assessment, which reveals that staff perceive their school as neutral or weak on two-thirds of the items addressing home-school relations. Yet, the committee had not met to address these limitations. The principal noted that another district policy, which provides financial incentives to schools with improved test scores, takes precedence. Staff are currently preparing for the next cycle of tests, and once completed, the committees will resume their work. Another barrier to implementation is that staff do not strongly endorse the effective schools policy. Mirroring the views of the principal, one teacher noted:

> Effective schools is a good idea, but we have lots of good ideas here, and we don't know what to subtract in order to do the new program. There is not enough time, and we feel like we are already implementing effective schools practices.

In brief, high student expectations are strongly modeled and reinforced by the principal. The school has become a neighborhood

resource, staff have gained the trust of parents, and they do keep parents informed. Further, staff clearly respect the difficult conditions confronting poor parents, yet their perspective may include an assumption that such parents are not able to participate in more active ways. This mindset affected responses to reaching out policies. For example, staff strongly endorsed mandated teacher-parent conferences, and used district assistance to enhance the quality of these meetings. In contrast, the school declined district assistance and did not follow-up on in-service aimed at involving parents through other strategies such as family math and home-learning activities. Staff have not found these initiatives applicable to their needs, and instead have used foundation support to set up two neighborhood homework centers that provide tutorial assistance and a place to study. This is a positive action, yet again, does not require any collaboration between teachers and parents.

Shared Decision-Making in Prince Georges County, Maryland

The school district has selected certain schools for additional funding (used to reduce class size, and provide all-day kindergarten), with the mandate that they implement decision-making strategies based on the work of Comer (1988). A "School Planning and Management Team" (SPMT) is the backbone of this initiative. The development and implementation of a school improvement plan guide the SPMT, yet staff stressed that certain beliefs more strongly influenced their deliberations. The first is that students' social development underlies academic achievement, and that growth cannot

occur without a positive school climate. Staff further assume that all stakeholders must be involved in the ongoing process of "defining a positive school climate." To this end, the principal and teacher, support staff, and parent representatives comprise the SPMT, and decisions are made through consensus.

The SPMT serves as a vehicle for school reflection and problem prevention. It complements a multidisciplinary "Student Staff Services Team" (SSST) that meets weekly to discuss individual students. Staff feel supported by the teams:

> We are so close to the classroom that it is hard to see the forest from the trees. When my students are not doing well, or are acting up, my first response is that I'm doing something wrong. I bring it up at the (SPMT) meeting, and a parent may give me another way of looking at it based on their experience with kids. Or, I may find out that other teachers are having the same problem. If so, it becomes an issue for the SPMT. If not, help is available to me and parents through the SSST.

A collaborative orientation is fostered in other ways. Subsequent to each parent-focused school activity, the principal in one school requests written feedback from staff, and summarizes the comments, and then presents them to the SPMT for deliberation. Similarly, when the SSST observes recurring "problems" among students, they submit their findings to the SPMT. On a personal level, the principals actively monitor the frequency of parent conferences, and in one school, staff compete to make the "most unsolicited and positive" calls to parents. Staff emphasized that their small class size facilitates contact with all parents. However, when asked how a collaborative mindset develops, all staff quickly identified their principal -- one noted that "It's the

climate. You can't survive here unless you buy into the 'Comer Process.'" A principal commented that "after five years of preaching parent involvement, teachers quickly realize that they don't fit unless they develop this mindset."

It has been difficult to gain the participation of all parents. Rather than implement more parent activities, staff use strategies to obtain the trust of parents, and aim to ensure that they have successes within the school. Subsequent to initial contacts with parents, staff take actions to demonstrate that their concerns will be promptly addressed. Parents are then encouraged to attend school-wide events which are held frequently and comprise the schools' primary "parent" program. While one objective is to maintain parent interest in their children's schooling, staff stressed that each event is carefully organized to be child-centered so that students "come to identify with their parents in the school," have opportunities to practice social behavior, and are required to apply classroom learnings in an outside setting. For illustration, staff were enthused from a recent event, which had required extensive preparation by teachers, parents, and students.

> At dinner there were only three or four of us (teachers) who were clustered. The rest were sitting with the parents. This was much different than in the past... Kids were the maitre-d's and were introducing those who didn't know each other. We had practiced this, so I felt great. And to see them perform and teach black history, that was too much.

In sum, staff in Prince Georges County were more likely than those in other schools to describe the parent role, as well as the teacher role, as that of a decision-maker. This mindset was

consistent with district policy mandating the SPMT, and was strongly encouraged and reinforced by the principals. Staff depend on the SPMTs and SSSTs to ensure that the needs of parents are addressed on a school-wide basis. However, each teacher is responsible for deciding with their parents which forms of participation (e.g., home learning, attending SPMT meetings) best meet the needs of the child and the interests of the parents. Teachers endorse this approach, in part, because their smaller classes allow for more time with each parent.

POLICIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Davies (1990) notes that school staff, parents, and community providers habitually think of the school's role as distinct and separate from those of the family and other social agencies or organizations which serve the child. Unfortunately, school organizational structures typically reinforce this mindset.

Education as a Shared Responsibility

The majority of schools were responding to policies which established new organizational structures. At times, however, the structures were not consistent with the concept of shared responsibility, and thus served to maintain the relative isolation among community stakeholders. Two policies affecting the Cleveland schools serve as examples. As discussed, the city created school-community councils to gain parent perspectives, but teachers were not given a role. The policy, through an organizational structure, thus set up an antagonistic position between the two primary caretakers. The results were as one might expect. First, according

to principals, the councils were largely ineffectual. Given the councils "advisory" role, with no clear purpose or authority, it was difficult to find parents to participate. Moreover, teachers tended to dismiss the councils, and expressed little interest in their actions. The business-school partnerships also isolated parents and teachers. While schools benefitted from the influx of money, the partnerships required little to no contact among teachers, parents, students, or business employees, and again, the concept of shared responsibility was not evident when staff spoke of this program. The program was well implemented -- business did adopt schools -- yet the program structure did not facilitate other types of collaboration.

In contrast, the district policy establishing Cleveland's IMPACT program sent a message that education is a shared responsibility, and it also provided teachers with time and a structure to gain involvement. Teachers responded by gaining the participation of many poor parents. A schoolwide notion of collaboration can also be fostered in other ways by policy. For example, a principal in Prince Georges County noted that required parent and teacher participation in school decision-making served to "model teaming for the whole school and the community," and therefore, set a tone that "all stakeholders really do have a stake in educating all children."

Parent Involvement as Instruction

Policies also communicate expectations regarding the value of parent involvement. These expectations seem to have powerful

influences on staff mindsets and behaviors. In Indiana, the state has authorized schools to use two half-days of "instructional time" for parent conferencing. This reflects a decrease from previous years, yet the policy has sparked frequent discussion among policy-makers as to the role of parents. On the building level, staff strongly endorse conferences, and showed initiative in expanding this mandate by taking advantage of district technical assistance and establishing additional mechanisms for keeping parents informed about their children's schooling.

Different outcomes are witnessed when policy sends a different message. In Cleveland, time is allocated for conferencing during teacher's planning periods or after school, but the time spent is not counted as "instructional." Teachers approved of the extra pay, but did not endorse the policy because it provided insufficient time for implementation. Teachers responded by making many calls, but they were often cursory. Given that poor and ethnic minority parents are less likely to respond to initial teacher requests or recommendations, it is probable that teachers were unable to reach those parents who might have benefitted most.

Summary: Congruence Between Policy Messages and Structures

Policies send clear messages regarding the notion of collaboration and the value of parent participation. Messages are strengthened or weakened depending on whether time is allocated to meet policy goals. Yet even when collaboratively-oriented policies are enacted, they often run counter to the overall organization and mission of the school. Davies (1990) states this position:

> Often, a schools reaching out project is like fitting a square peg into a round hole. There are many real barriers to staff when seeking to change the shape of the round hole to accommodate the square peg.

In some schools, certain policies did allow some teachers to fit the peg into the hole. This did not, however, necessarily contribute to a schoolwide consensus that additional efforts were needed to make this accommodation. Quite often, the changes were program specific (as in Cleveland's IMPACT program), and did not influence other school operations. It is likely that only schoolwide organizational changes can result in sustained, schoolwide efforts to establish collaborative programs, as witnessed in Prince Georges County. That is, policy goals urging schoolwide collaborative efforts are unlikely to be implemented unless a consistent structure is also put into place.

The Richmond school visited highlights this conclusion. Due to federal funding cuts, the school can provide Follow Through services to only half of its elementary school classes. In the Follow Through classes, trained aides split their time working with parents in the community and instructing children in the classroom. This structure facilitates home and school collaborations, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Almost all parents attend conferences, use school instructional materials in the home, and participate (either in the classroom or by doing tasks at home) in program implementation. In comparison, in the non-Follow Through classes, teachers have been much less successful in involving poor parents in the education of their children. This outcome arose,

despite that the same principal -- one who strongly endorsed parent involvement -- was responsible for both Follow Through and the regular instructional program.

PRINCIPAL AS INTERMEDIARY

Most reaching out policies provide schools with broad latitude to interpret mandates and to make implementation decisions that reflect local conditions. By virtue of the principal's position and authority, he or she is a key actor in the implementation process.

Messages Sent By Principals

No one is more important in setting the tone and direction of a school than the principal. In this inquiry, all teachers interviewed knew clearly what was expected of them, thus indicating that the principals were successful in communicating their message. Included in each principal's message was a vision of the role of parents, and a perspective of desireable reaching out, and how to obtain it. All principals used small incentives and rewards to encourage teachers to gain parent participation, and modeled the types of behavior that was expected towards parents. Often, the message was explicit, as stated by a Richmond principal:

> I'm always trying to address the teachers' concerns, and I'm trying to show I care [about them]. In return, I expect teachers to respect my concerns. And I make it clear that parent involvement is my biggest concern.

Some principals used recruitment as a strategy to hire staff who shared their vision of serving low-income and ethnic minority children. While these principals were fortunate in having few "administrative" transfers, it is also clear that they worked

directly with district staff to ensure that their applicant pool reflected their beliefs. A principal in Richmond commented:

> Their application papers tell me something about their knowledge, their experience, and they tell me a little about whether they can teach in the classroom. But I'm interested in them as people first. So I ask two questions, 'How do you feel about working in the inner city?,' and 'Do you belong to any community groups or churches?' I'm trying to find out if they are community-minded, and if they are, that is who I want.

One Prince Georges principal spoke of her recruitment efforts when the school was first identified as a pilot project for serving low-achieving students. She made it clear to all applicants that parent involvement would be a major part of the project, and that teachers would be expected to make extra time for parents. Over the first two years of implementation, about 70 percent of the staff transferred. The principal believed that racism was a factor, yet the final outcome was good, since "I now have teachers who want to work with a challenging group of kids and parents." The principal also noted that her ongoing efforts to listen to teachers served as the best vehicle for assessing teachers and applicants:

> I'm always listening. Do they really believe that all kids can learn and that all parents care? Do they speak in generalities like 'these kids' or do they say 'this child'? I'm interested in staff who can get past the stereotypes. I know my message is getting through when teachers speak of children and parents as individuals.

Principal Training

Principals are usually not selected on their knowledge of parent involvement or skill in directing reform-oriented projects, and often they have little experience in leadership tasks such as managing decision-making groups or finding a balance between

directing and empowering teachers. Indeed, such knowledge and skills are not typically part of the principal training, and many find that management and leadership functions are the most difficult aspects of their profession (Thomson, 1988; Daresh, 1988).

While leadership and skill is essential for successful implementation, principals need assistance in understanding the purposes of reform. Without a commitment to the basic goals and program framework, and a concurrent belief that the reform will actually help students, the policy is typically underutilized. Two principals spoke of the usefulness of program models:

> Follow Through really isn't anything I didn't know before it started. But it put the pieces together, and gave me a way, an organized way, to think about what I wanted to achieve in the school;

> My goal is to help children develop, and the Comer model allows me to do that. It provides a vision of child development and a set of strategies and structures for making the vision work.

Principals must consistently adapt to changing priorities, and thus Barth (1988) argues for training to focus on process rather than content-oriented issues. In Florida, for example, principal certification requires training in managerial and interpersonal skills associated with school-based management, participatory decision-making, and the creation of partnerships (Leslie, Snyder and Giddis, 1988). This emphasis was reflected by one district administrator:

> It doesn't work if the principal is a 'blocker.' A few blockers just don't want parent involvement, and there is nothing that can be done. Most blockers, however, don't fully understand the philosophy behind this program, lack the skills to manage groups, or can't convey trust. So we take them to Comer, early on, for three days of training, then we have an ongoing discussion group for principals to talk about issues.

Summary: Creation of a School Culture

Reaching out policies can have a powerful effect on school organization and programs, and send messages as to what is valued by the state or district. Within these parameters, principals communicate to staff their interpretations of what is desireable reaching out behavior. Among schools in this inquiry, it was evident that relationships among policy, staff perspectives, and school practice were mediated by the principal.

While staff interviewed were not selected randomly, the data suggests that principals were effective in fostering a shared schoolwide perspective. In each school, staff discussed "reaching out" consistent with the goals of policy. In Cleveland, for example, reaching out was primarily defined as business and community partnerships, or through the identification of specific programs. In Indianapolis, it was discussed as parent conferences and other communication strategies. In Prince Georges, the term had a more general meaning, and was viewed as parent involvement in school decision-making.

In sum, the principal serves as an intermediary in the communication of policy, and in this position, articulates and promotes a school culture with regard to beliefs about the role of parents in the educational process. However, an unexpected outcome of policy may be that it limits staff discourse on "reaching out" or "parent participation" to those specific activities which are actually required.

SCHOOL CULTURE AND SHARED DECISION-MAKING

Principals must direct implementation with consideration of the existing school culture and other, sometimes conflicting, policy directives. Be it a state's legal definition of instructional days, a district's mandate for test score accountability, or provisions in a union contract, other policies affected the principals' priorities and commitment to reaching out initiatives. These external pressures were most likely to result in the underutilization of policies that required stakeholder collaboration in decision-making. One result was that schools missed opportunities to develop the notion of shared responsibility.

Purpose of Shared Decision-Making

When the stated purpose of decision-making structures was not explicit, they were likely to be viewed as unnecessary by staff. In Indianapolis, for example, staff perceived their school as effective in serving low-income children. As a result of this shared perspective, staff were skeptical of the district's loosely defined directive for "effective schools" councils. While staff strongly stated that they could do better in educating all children, they consciously chose to work on their own previously established goals and strategies. After progress was made, they expressed a willingness to try the "district's approach."

Outcomes were different when the purpose of such groups was explicit, and goals were established. In the Prince Georges schools, shared decision-making was not supplemental to the school's organization and thus served to define school culture and

organizational norms. Both the SPMT and SSST councils had clearly defined purposes, and were the primary planning forums for the school. Because of this, staff strongly endorsed and depended on the councils.

Empowerment and Cultural Awareness Among Stakeholders

Many teachers, removed from decision-making processes in the school, have become disillusioned with their profession, and feel as though they have little control over their work lives. Policies requiring parent involvement can be easily perceived by teachers as another factor limiting their autonomy. In brief, teachers are unlikely to reach out to poor parents unless they themselves feel supported by administrators, and are empowered to make decisions affecting their work. Participation in school decision-making is one way to address these needs and instill the notion of shared responsibility. Krasnow (1990) concludes, for example, that such participation serves to empower teachers, promote staff collegiality, and foster a greater sense of professionalism. Teachers are more likely to reach out to parents. The same experiences are likely to promote parents' willingness to work with teachers. That is, teachers and parents can learn from and respect each other only when they have structured opportunities to discuss, and make decisions, on issues of importance to both parties. As Lightfoot (1975) writes:

> The ambiguous, gray areas of authority and responsibility between parents and teachers exacerbate the distrust between them. The distrust is further complicated by the fact that it is rarely articulated, but usually remains smoldering and silent.

The Cooperative Communication Project, as reported by Hamilton and Cochran (1988), was designed to directly address this silence, and in doing so, found that the program served to empower stakeholders. First, teachers and parents met in separate groups to discuss their concerns and expectations. When each group determined that they had reached consensus, they came together in a single group to discuss their sometimes competing perspectives and to plan future activities. Similar experiences, where stakeholders have the opportunity to discuss concerns and reflect on others' perspectives also facilitate a multicultural orientation, whereby adults come to value the strengths of persons of different ethnicities and social positions (Pine and Hilliard, 1990; Batts, 1990; Zeldin, 1989). Two teachers explain:

> We learn from parents even when we don't think we are learning. We all have stereotypes to some degree, and our own way of doing things, but when we talk to parents we sometimes find better ways of doing it.
>
> A friend went with me to visit a parent. After we left, she said 'did you realize you were talking down to her, and did not really look at her?' I was shocked, but the more I thought, I realized that I actually did think I was better than that woman. The next time, I thought of her differently, and wouldn't you know, now she comes in to work with her son once a week. Regularly.

Summary: Consensus and Appreciation of Differences

Policy-makers often direct two groups of disempowered stakeholders -- teachers and poor and culturally diverse parents -- to work jointly for the benefit of children. Yet, when such linkages are not formed, one or both parties are blamed. This may be putting the cart before the horse. It may be necessary to give

stakeholders a degree of power and control over decision-making before they are expected to form partnerships. In San Diego, for example, district staff felt as though they had no choice but to take this approach. Noting that over 80 languages were spoken by parents in the district, and that cultural groups held different expectations regarding the relationship between home and school, the district is giving schools latitude to develop their own programs, with an important caveat being that decisions must be made after active participation by all stakeholders. One staff member concluded:

> Decisions about the types of programs have to come from each school. We have so much diversity, and a program designed for a school with South Americans simply won't be successful in an area where there are many Laotians.

In sum, opportunities for shared decision-making, with the aim of developing consensus and a respect for cultural differences, had positive effects for some schools and individual teachers. Achieving consensus is a time-consuming task, yet must be achieved before sustained linkages can be formed.

INTERACTIONS AMONG TEACHERS AND PARENTS

The success of policy rests on interactions among individual teachers and parents. Whether planned or not, teachers always have a high degree of autonomy in determining their own level of commitment to reaching out initiatives. A lack of time is one barrier to this commitment, yet many teachers also question the benefits of direct parent involvement. The same is true for those parents who are given a real option to participate. After years of

being targets of racism and classism, many are hesitant to enter schools or to work directly with teachers. Additionally, many immigrant and refugee parents have adopted cultural values where involvement in schools is not part of the adult role. Consistent parent involvement is unlikely until these challenges are directly addressed.

Time for Interpersonal Relations

All schools organized special schools events (e.g., father's day, grade level breakfasts, evening entertainment) to promote parent-teacher contact, and all teachers found them effective in developing relationships and trust. This is not surprising given that such events provide one of the few opportunities for teachers and poor parents to interact in a relaxed setting where differences can be minimized and the focus is not on student achievement issues. Thus, special events, when they result in positive interaction, may be a prerequisite for teachers to overcome the belief that poor and ethnic minority parents are not able or willing to participate in more active ways.

This view is supported by multicultural theory and research. That is, while the presentation of information can contribute to cultural awareness, persons from divergent backgrounds need to express and discuss differences before a multicultural orientation can develop (Batts, 1990; Pine and Hilliard, 1990). Similarly, Epstein and Becker (1982) demonstrate that teachers who have had positive experiences with poor parents are more likely to endorse involvement and are better able to obtain continued participation

than those who have had little contact with parents. Lareau (1989) concludes that teachers who have had positive and productive relations with parents find such interactions to be one of the most rewarding aspects of their profession.

Teachers also desired opportunities to work with parents in goal-oriented ways, yet felt that time was not available. In this inquiry, those teachers who had time to work with parents, either because of smaller class sizes or allocated "parent time" (e.g. Cleveland's IMPACT program, Richmond's Follow Through program, and Prince Georges schools), were less likely to express fear and hesitation in working with poor parents, and instead spoke of the ways that parents actually made their job easier. When a student was experiencing problems, teachers noted the benefits of working with parents:

> If I approach the parent in a non-threatening way, it works. It's better if I can convince a parent to come in to the classroom. They see me in action, and they see that I'm trying my best. This really helps, and I don't feel like an intruder when I call them the next time.

School staff often spoke of strategies to gain the trust and involvement of poor families, and believed that parents also needed positive interactions before a collaborative orientation could develop. The need for empowerment was also discussed. As noted, staff in Prince Georges County seek to construct the success of parents as a mechanism to facilitate a greater sense of self-confidence. In Richmond, empowerment is fostered through the structural organization of the program. The selection of home

learning activities is based not only on the performance of the child, but also that of the parent:

> Home learning activities have an assessment function, and I can keep track of which parents are willing or able to help out with their kids. But the best use I think is that the activities are good for parents, they see that they can learn too. I guess I'm trying to work on the competence of the parents. Just like all of us, they need successful experiences, so we at the school give them positive reinforcement, and give them progressively more difficult tasks to perform.
>
> Parents have to trust you or nothing happens. I don't care how good your program is. Lots of my parents have never been involved with school, and they don't think they can do anything. So I show them that how they have survived is good. They've already done it in the face of bad times. I show them specific ways that they can build on this if they want. And then, I make sure that I address their felt needs. If I can accomplish this, I can get them involved.

Parent Education

Parent education has a long history, and is currently seen as insufficient to promote home-school relations. Yet, parent education was viewed as primary service component by most staff and as a strategy for gaining the trust and participation of poor parents. In Richmond, for example, it was used as a tool to empower parents. By design, parents selected the topics to be presented, and staff played a supportive role by making necessary arrangements.

Parent education can serve other purposes. For parents who have not completed much formal education, the task of working with schools is difficult. Often, they do not know how to translate their high expectations into caretaker behavior that supports high achievement. In Plano and San Diego, for example, parent education

was seen as an essential first step toward the participation of immigrant and refugee parents. And while the topics covered may appear basic (report cards, parent conferences, homework) to many, staff emphasized that this is often new information for parents. A principal commented:

> I know it is important for fathers to talk with me. But my first goal is to make contact with anybody in the family. In many cultures, it is the mother's job to work with the school -- if anybody is 'supposed' to -- and we have not made enough inroads yet, or have enough experience, to reach the whole family.

Language and transportation barriers also existed for immigrant families who had little money or no drivers license. Combined with poor public transportation systems, staff in Plano and San Diego make special efforts to overcome these barriers -- interpreters are hired, transportation provided, and parent education is held in the communities. This has required significant resources, but as one teacher commented, "we really have no choice in the matter."

Summary: "Beyond the Bake Sale" Revisited

Policies cannot dictate the behavior of individuals, and unless policy explicitly seeks to influence the attitudes of teachers and parents, on an individual level, it is unlikely that implementation will be successful. The phrase "beyond the bake sale" is often used to indicate the need for schools to go beyond the operation of school-based "special events." While this is true, they should not be discounted. School social events which engage parents and teachers in informal conversation appear to be one

important precursor to collaborative orientations. The fact that teachers enjoy meeting parents in non-threatening situations is important given the wariness that exists among many teachers. Conversely, it has been the experience of many teachers that parents require these opportunities to develop trust in school staff. Parent education programs, especially when teachers attend, can serve similar purposes. For new residents in the United States, as well as those who have been disenfranchised from the school, such activities may be essential to communicate cultural expectations and "acceptable ways" for participation.

The utility of school events and parent education most strongly facilitates child growth when he or she is present in these settings. Observing parent-teacher interactions has direct benefits for all children, especially those from poor or ethnically diverse families. As noted by Comer (1988) and Bronfenbrenner (1978), development is fostered when the child observes primary caretakers working together, since it serves to reduce the dissonance between home and school. This premise was a primary determinant for planning special events in Prince Georges County, and for encouraging parents in Richmond to participate in classroom instruction.

> I try to get parents of the 'problem' kids into the classroom. Why? Because the child gets to see that the parent cares about education, and that's the most important thing for children at this age.
>
> I 'require' parents or significant others to go on field trips with their kids. This doesn't always happen, of course, but most of the time somebody comes, be it a grandmother, uncle or neighbor. This is because my goal really is to foster connections among my parents, children and teachers...

> Recently, a local business gave us money to go to Alvin Ailey. Then, we all came back to the school with some of the dancers and had a mini-seminar. The kids are still dancing, and I know that parents look at us more as 'the community.'

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Policies aimed at promoting collaboration must begin by acknowledging that the school building is the basic unit of educational change. As seen in this inquiry, state and district mandates can facilitate or diminish the change process, but ultimately, it is school staff -- the policy implementors -- who make the initiative work. If building administrators and teachers do not perceive a need for change, or have the necessary tools to make changes, neither pressure or support from the state and district will result in successful implementation. The question and challenge facing policy-makers is how to promote the notion that school-home-community partnerships are integral to the success of all children. This inquiry indicates that some policies can be effective towards this end.

District Support, Structures and the Principal

Mindsets change slowly and need to be nurtured, and it is not reasonable for districts to provide one or two years of active support, and then expect schools to continue their efforts. Ongoing assistance is necessary. Continued funding plans should be established before a policy is put into effect -- programs funded for a brief period of time are viewed by staff as "this year's model," and are implemented without full commitment. The

promise of ongoing district support communicates that reaching out really is a priority.

Attention needs to be given both to the message of policy, as well as the structures it creates. Policies need to communicate the notion of shared responsibility, yet more to the point, need to establish structures which are consistent with that message. Independent of policy goals, some policies create structures which simply reinforce the isolation of parents and teachers. Stakeholder endorsement occurs when policy establishes parent involvement as an integral part of school operations. Therefore, policy-makers should not mandate such programs without a serious re-evaluation of goals, priorities, and the limitations of time.

Second to policy, the principal is the key determinant of school culture, and sets the tone and expectations for defining what is appropriate parent involvement. When the policy is general, as is often the case with decision-making forums, the principal contributes greatly to a school culture which can overwhelm formal structures. Policy thus needs to focus attention on the principal, and seek to gain his or her commitment, if effective implementation is to occur. Districts need to select principals with special leadership skills needed in low performing schools and for implementing reform. Such principals could be offered flexibility in hiring teachers, and "parent issues" should be a criteria for evaluating teachers. Ongoing training for principals is necessary, and it is important that such training be initiated prior to implementation.

Shared Decision-Making and Cultural Sensitivity

Many teachers wish to contribute solutions to school problems. Without this opportunity, parent involvement is perceived as another imposition on their influence in the instructional process. Shared decision-making facilitates teacher empowerment and a cooperative mindset. Such forums help to change the school culture by maintaining a high profile for reaching out efforts. Over time, and as more teachers participate, changes in the school culture can occur. Parents need to be given a real role in the decision-making process. Not only does this enhance the learning of teachers, but over time, it also facilitates the notion among parents that the school is a community resource. One principal commented:

> Most of our families live in projects that are very close together, and I've spent much time talking with the project managers about what we are doing, and how we want to respond to parents. The word does spread among parents if your actions are consistent with it.

The idea of home-school linkages is new to many immigrant and refugee populations. Until efforts are made to inform such parents about the value of collaboration, and to identify options for participation, it is likely that reaching out efforts will be unsuccessful. Similarly, different cultural groups may choose to participate in different ways. Policy must address this issue, and provide time for staff to understand varied cultures and to appreciate the ways in which they choose to be involved with schools.

Many teachers and poor and ethnic minority parents are skeptical of each others' ability to promote the development and

achievement of children. This skepticism is reinforced by cultural norms and institutional structures. On a school level, parents also need a real role in decision-making. Not only do schools benefit from hearing parents' perspectives, but both staff and parents are better able to reach consensus and address mutual concerns. Both stakeholder groups also need opportunities to meet in non-threatening situations, as well as in more structured, child-centered conference settings. Until trust is established, it is unlikely that either teachers or parents will be motivated to sustain participation.

Differential teacher practices towards poor or ethnic parents are usually not malicious in intent. For example, many teachers demonstrate their compassion by not expecting participation from poor parents. Yet, this "dysfunctional rescuing" (see Batts, 1989), ultimately serves to disempower parents. Conversely, internalized oppression among such parents often leads them to blame the school as the sole determinant of their children's poor achievement, or to adopt the stance that they don't have the skills to contribute. Participation in decision-making groups, and ongoing personal interactions, can strongly diminish these beliefs. If they are addressed directly early in implementation, through free and open discussion, subsequent training in parent involvement strategies is likely to have a greater payoff.

Recommendations

This inquiry confirms the simple observation that it takes sustained attention over a relatively long period of time to form working partnerships among schools and parents. The schools in this inquiry, by selection, were more committed than most schools to forming partnerships, and had spent a minimum of two years planning and implementing parent-oriented programs. And while they were proud of their accomplishments, and the outcomes of their efforts, all staff believed strongly that they had further to go. As one administrator concluded:

> We have ideas and we have a vision, but it takes time and patience. After all, we are trying to change the school culture [here]. So we celebrate our successes along the way, and keep trying to implement our ideas because we know that it is necessary to get the parents involved for their children to succeed.

District Level Options. Policy-makers, like many of us, strive for quick results. Usually, therefore, a reaching out program is hurriedly designed and put into place. The importance of "process" is often discussed, but typically gets lost in the rush. Yet reaching out programs are dependent on process. It is through the process of forming interpersonal relations that collaborative orientations arise. The development of staff empowerment and parental trust is another process. Finally, the adaptation of effective parent participation models to the needs of specific schools is a process. While we might wish that relationships would form quickly, this is rarely the case. Thus, it seems essential for policy-makers to provide schools with time to let these processes

work before expecting to see the final model or easily measurable student outcomes. When districts offer guidance and leadership to schools as they work through these processes, implementation is most likely to be effective.

- Districts need to assign staff with explicit parent-oriented responsibilities, and sufficient time and support needs to be given to their efforts. District staff can conduct many activities -- reviewing the ever-growing body of literature, proposing program options, providing technical support, planning -- that school staff often do not have the time to do. Additionally, district staff have the potential to identify and interpret federal, state, and district programs that have "parent components," such as Chapter 1 and special education provisions, to propose strategies for schools to "bundle" funds and integrate services.

- Districts can establish explicit parent participation policies and objectives. In San Diego, a comprehensive policy sets forth the goals of parent participation, and also identifies the district's responsibilities. It has served to "legitimize" reaching out as a district goal, and also provides some organizational power to district staff working on such programs. Policies can also be used as a standard through which to assess the progress of schools.

School Administration Options. This inquiry indicates that the principal is the key actor in the implementation of reaching out policies. It is essential, therefore, that districts take the time, and allocate resources, to ensure that principals understand the goals of a parent-oriented initiative, and equally important, become invested in its success. Likewise, principals must take action to gain the commitment of all school stakeholders.

- Principals need to receive focused training on parent initiatives, and real opportunities to participate in the development, planning, and implementation of policies. Principals are most likely to learn and exchange ideas when in the company of peers who have implemented successful programs, and this should be a major component of any training. Finally, district provision of

ongoing training/deliberation seems important to support principals through implementation.

- Principals also need to be afforded flexibility during the implementation process. Because of grade level and social class differences across district schools, a reaching out policy cannot be implemented in a uniform manner. Principals can benefit from policy parameters, but need the authority to make implementation decisions based on local conditions.

- Principals respond daily to numerous policies, and some find it necessary to "postpone" implementation of reaching out policies. Districts can facilitate successful implementation by requiring principals to be accountable for their decisions. The inclusion of parent participation criteria in the evaluation and promotion of principals would serve to reward those who are making substantial progress in reaching out efforts.

School Level Options. Implementation ultimately depends on the degree to which teachers can reach out to parents in ways that will facilitate participation. Certainly, time for such actions is a prerequisite, but as seen in this inquiry, teachers will often work beyond allocated time when they believe in the initiative. The key determinant is that teachers need to be supported in their efforts to reach out to parents.

- Schools reaching out requires collaboration among administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, and it cannot be sustained by a single group or individual. Ongoing opportunities for shared decision-making, in a group that has the authority to make important decisions, not only serves to empower participants, but also ensures that a range of ideas are included in school dialogue.

- The notion of shared educational responsibility has not been encouraged in recent years by policy-makers, and it is not surprising that many teachers and parents have not fully endorsed reaching out policies. Like principals, teachers and parents need information and in-service training on parent participation issues. Sources of tension existing among stakeholders cannot be ignored. Multicultural training, aimed at helping

stakeholders understand and respect persons of different positions, incomes and ethnicities, seems especially important.

- Reaching out is one of many responsibilities placed on teachers that, by necessity, needs to be fulfilled during planning periods or on their own time. While it may not be immediately possible to give all teachers some additional time to work on parent-oriented initiatives, this could be a district goal. Strategies also need to be implemented to support and reinforce teachers to reach out. It is also important to include "parent participation" criteria as part of evaluation and promotion decisions.

In sum, as districts become more segregated by class and ethnicity, it will become more difficult for a single initiative to address the needs of all stakeholders. The best strategy for district policy-makers may be to mandate the formation of local decision-making bodies, with the concurrent directive that earmarked funds be allocated to these groups for the purpose of implementing a long-term, and sequenced, schoolwide plan. If districts set parameters for the plan, provide ongoing assistance in identifying program options, and monitor progress, educators and parents would be in a position to identify those approaches most consistent with their needs, and those of the students.

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Shepherd Zeldin, Ph.D., conducts evaluations of education/family support programs for poor families and their children. He works for the National Academy of Sciences (Washington, DC) as Project Director for the Panel on High Risk Youth, and is a consultant for VISIONS (Cambridge, MA), where he conducts workshops and research on multicultural issues.

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